

Black Task Force Report

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Black Task Force Report

Project on Ethnicity

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New York, New York

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Foreword

As part of its continuing efforts to relate meaningfully to ethnic minority concerns, Family Service Association of America secured funding from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) for a two-year pilot project for the development of model mental health service delivery systems to the black and Puerto Rican communities. The project reflects the desire of FSAA and its membership to respond more appropriately to minority needs and issues and represents a major attempt by FSAA to refine and develop further the knowledge, understanding, and skills needed for working in partnership with ethnic communities. It is hoped that this project, as was the original intent, will eventually be expanded to include other ethnic minorities so that differences and commonalities among other groups can be identified and addressed. Service deliverers with access to this knowledge would thus be in a better position to implement more relevant programs for the various groups.

With the support obtained from NIMH, the cooperation of FSAA membership, and the help of other experts outside of the family service field, it was possible for FSAA to establish an Advisory Committee and a Black and a Puerto Rican Task Force. The Task Force Reports represent the culmination of the first phase of the project, which was the identification of the relevant content needed for the delivery of culturally sensitive, skilled, and effective human services in black and Puerto Rican communities and the development of a model for delivery of these services.

The next phase of this project includes the development of curriculum materials for use in continuing education programs and workshops for training family agency staff in the use of the model. Consultation will also be provided to family service agencies to assist them in implementation of the model, and the model will be publicized to encourage its use by other facilities concerned with delivery of services to ethnic minorities.

This Report reflects a consensus of the views of the Black Task Force supported by a strong service-focused literature base. It was well received by the Ethnicity Project Advisory Committee, who also played a significant role in the development of the framework for the model.

Introduction

The major aim of this Report is to develop a model of mental health service delivery to the urban, low-income, black American community. The perspective taken here assumes that racism and poverty have placed constraints on the development and functioning of all systems, both internal and external, related to the black family. The selection of urban, low-income black Americans as the focus for service does not deny the impact of racism on the functioning of other black cultural subgroups; the element of color is deeply embedded in the response mechanisms of wider societal systems in America. It is recognized that regional, socioeconomic, and national origin differences produce cultural variations in the black community. Within the limits of this model, however, the focus is restricted to an examination of the unique experiences of those black Americans in urban centers whose economic levels limit access to the goods and services necessary to maintain "a general standard of decency, health, and expectation consistent with standards of the larger society."¹ This population appears to be most at risk and has the fewest options for service.

The study of black family life has produced a number of publications that are valuable resources for human service planners and practitioners who seek to enhance their capacities to relate to the needs of the black community. There is, however, a negative theme which permeates much of the research done prior to the late 1960s and which seems to derive from the faulty assumption that poor black families can be assessed using the norms established for white middle-class families. The harmful effects of racism and poverty are not dealt with, and the finding that some black families function differently from the middle class is given a deficit interpretation which influences policy, planning, and practice toward change within black family systems.

With the publication of Andrew Billingsley's *Black Families in White*

1. Ben A. Orcutt, "Poverty on the American Scene: Social Casework Service as Essential to Intervention with Problems of Poor People," in *Poverty and Social Casework Services*, ed., Ben A. Orcutt (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974), p. 5.

Section I

A Conceptual Framework

Historical and Contemporary Social Conditions

For black Americans, racism has been an enduring phenomenon that shifts and changes with legislation, the state of the economy, or the political climate, but gives little indication of declining in significance in the major institutions that influence the development of human potential. During the era of slavery, the belief that some men (whites) are by nature superior to other men (blacks) encouraged physical and psychological brutality that was dehumanizing, life-threatening, and detrimental to the development of a sense of well-being among blacks. The larger society values and goals which promoted individual achievement through domination of other men and the environment were in direct conflict with the value orientations of the slaves, who sought freedom, social equality, self-determination, and a harmonious relationship with man and nature. It was within this setting, where common human needs were being ignored, that internal helping mechanisms were initiated to aid in the struggle for survival and the achievement of a measure of life satisfaction in American society.

Informal systems of mutual support served to alleviate some of the harmful effects of the hostile external system.¹ Through creative modification of African cultural modes, some individuals and groups were able to sustain themselves and to obtain relief from the tensions of their circumstances. Recognition of their common status and goals encouraged the cooperative sharing of food, housing, medical care, and child care. Emotional support and advice were given in times of crisis, and a sense of belonging was achieved through communal activities such as singing, dancing, and religious gatherings. Mutual aid on an

1. Lerone Bennet, Jr., *Before the Mayflower* (Chicago, Ill.: Johnson Publishing Company, 1964); E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (New York: McMillan Company, 1964); and Joanne V. Rhone, "Social Service Delivery System Among Slaves (1619-1790)," in *Social Service Delivery System in the Black Community During the Ante-Bellum Period (1619-1860)*, ed. Gayle J. Alexander (Atlanta, Ga.: Atlanta University School of Social Work, 1973).

The increased educational attainment of blacks as measured by the number of years of schooling completed has not yet resulted in a reduced unemployment rate:

The high school enrollment rate for whites increased 3.9 percent between 1970-1976 while black enrollment recorded a significantly higher percentage, 23.1 percent. Moreover, between 1970-1975, the proportion of students graduating from high school was significantly higher for blacks than for whites, narrowing the educational gap . . . Analysis of dropout rates for both groups provide further evidence of progress. For [16-17 year olds] the dropout rate for whites is approximately 8.4 percent and for blacks, 9.5 percent.⁷

The absence of the tools necessary for equal black participation in the economic system may result from the second-rate education offered by the public institutions that serve communities with large minority group populations. Many high schools are allowing students to graduate who are functionally illiterate and are, therefore, poorly equipped for the demands of a technological society. Institutional structures and policies perpetuate black unemployment and poverty when shifts in the economy and new technology reduce the need for "low-value skills" in the production of goods and services, and access to the education and training needed for "high-value skills" is blocked by limited income, or by exclusion through a contemporary form of racism that uses code words such as "reverse discrimination," "quotas," or "lowered standards." The good vocational schools may be located in all-white neighborhoods and require "busing," and the available jobs may be offered in suburban areas that discourage low-income housing and have limited public transportation. These institutional patterns may or may not have been consciously designed to subordinate blacks, but their impact can be felt in the functioning of those families who encounter hostility and rejection as they attempt to negotiate the systems of employment, housing, education, health care, and other areas that sustain life. Economic self-sufficiency not only assures survival needs, it also permits energy reserves to become focused on the expressive functions vital to growth and to the achievement of a sense of well-being.

The problem for many black families is that poverty is a pervasive factor in their lives that shows little evidence of declining in its significance. Robert B. Hill reports that "between 1975 and 1976, the number of persons in black families who were below the official poverty level increased by 100,000 . . . raising the proportion of poor persons in black families from 27 to 28 percent."⁸ The majority of black families have incomes well under \$10,000, which may enable survival but has

7. Bernard C. Watson, "Education," *The State of Black America 1978*, (New York: National Urban League, 1978), p. 41-42.

8. Hill, "The Economic Status of Black Families," p. 27.

mines the quality of life experienced. In describing how the system works for majority group middle-class families, John Papajohn and John Spiegel indicate that:

The family in American society is integrated with the occupational, social class, and educational systems. The class position of the family in the United States . . . depends very much on the position held by the father in the occupational world. But it is also true that his job depends on certain qualifications attained through education and training. Furthermore, the education one receives depends largely on the family.¹¹

Although majority group Americans have full access to the economic, social, and political systems that facilitate integration of the instrumental and expressive aspects of culture, the experience of black Americans who seek accommodation with those systems is one of depreciation and exclusion. These threats to survival and self-esteem require adaptations which "cause a split in the acculturative process resulting in the development of a duality of culture."¹² To function in both cultures requires "two parallel and opposing thought structures—each based on values, norms, and beliefs and supported by attitudes, feelings, and behaviors—that imply feelings of depreciation on the one hand and a push for transcendence on the other."¹³ An acute sensitivity to environmental stimuli is essential to black survival, achievement, and protection of self-esteem.

Creative social and psychological adaptive mechanisms have provided a source of help for generations in the black community and their continued viability can be seen in those families whose members are functioning successfully in their internal and external environments. Variations in functioning, however, are influenced by individual differences, economic diversity, and the relative capacity of the family and community to protect its members from the most damaging aspects of racism. Some black families have limited options for survival and may select coping mechanisms that are dysfunctional to self and to others. The majority of black families, however, use the functional aspects of black culture that offer the support necessary to transcend the barriers of wider society systems.

African Base

The historical and contemporary social conditions experienced by blacks have set the stage for a variety of adaptations, which some scholars see as derivatives of the African cultural base.¹⁴ Wade W.

11. John Papajohn and John Spiegel, *Transactions in Families* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1975), p. 8.

12. Chestang, "Environmental Influences," p. 70.

13. Chestang, *Character Development in a Hostile Society*, p. 7.

14. Joyce A. Ladner, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman* (Garden City, N.Y.

The types of extended families include: (a) the incipient extended family, consisting of a married couple with no children of their own who take in other relatives; (b) the simple extended family, consisting of a married couple with their own children, who take in other relatives; and (c) the attenuated extended family, consisting of a single, abandoned, legally separated, divorced, or widowed mother or father living with his or her own children, who takes into the household other relatives.¹⁸

Those families who take in roomers, boarders, or other unrelated individuals are considered augmented families. This type is frequently observed in the low-income black community and Billingsley observes that "unrelated persons often exert major influence in the organization of Negro families."¹⁹

Extended Family Relationships

One of the most creative adaptations observed in the black community is the development of extended kin relations to support individual and group needs through the sharing of households, food, money, child care services, and emotional support. The value of such practice is readily seen when economic resources are limited, but Harriette Pipes McAdoo's study of black middle-class families reveals that: "The cultural pattern is not only associated with poor economic status but is maintained after entrance into more secure status because of the lack of wider community support."²⁰

The extended family is a supportive structure which is used with varying levels of intensity throughout the life span of individuals and families. Geographic mobility may decrease the frequency of face-to-face contact but relationships are maintained through letters, telephone calls, or word-of-mouth with availability generally confirmed in times of crises. Urbanization has created strains on the kin-help system, but internal structures and relationships within the black community, such as churches, neighborhood groups, and social clubs, have been major sustaining forces in a hostile environment.

The family network concept expands in the black community to include others who are not related by blood or marriage. "Play sister," "cousin," or "home boy" describe relationships with origins in a former neighborhood or a common birthplace in the South that gives a sense of closeness. In several northern urban centers, social clubs have been organized by migrants from southern towns to reproduce the sense of community and to reduce the feeling of isolation. Such relationships offer the mutual aid and emotional support needed when physically separated from blood or marital kin. The informal system of adoption common in the

18. Ibid., p. 19.

19. Ibid., p. 21.

20. Harriette Pipes McAdoo, "The Impact of Upward Mobility on the Reciprocal Obligations of Kin-Help Patterns in Black Families." Paper presented at the National Urban League Conference on Black Families, Chicago, Illinois, 4 November 1977, p. 39.

to obtain basic needs and, possibly, a few luxuries. The models of two parents employed or one parent holding two jobs clearly demonstrates for the children the societal expectations for the receipt of goods and services.

The Black Church

The strong religious orientation of many black families has been a major sustaining element in the struggle to cope with social realities from the era of slavery to the present. Religion and the black church are adaptive mechanisms which historically have supported both social and psychological needs. During the period of slavery, the black man "had to look elsewhere for a more positive definition of himself and to release feelings that might cost him his life had they been directed at the white oppressor."²⁴ Religion and the social activities provided by the church were supportive features which gave hope for a better day. In addition to its satisfaction of spiritual needs and its value-setting function, the church was a focal point of community life where:

... a series of social, recreational, education, economic and political needs of the community were reflected ... It was an assembly hall for protest meetings and other activities which usually dealt with the crucial social issue of the day—"slavery" ... it was an educational center where training in Christian Education and academics began. Above all, it was a social welfare agency concerned with the totality of its black membership.²⁵

The black church continues its viability as a component of black American culture; it has the capacity to adapt to the changing needs of its members. The church has traditionally provided an outlet for the expression of musical talents and organizational skills, and contemporary congregations offer day care centers, credit unions, housing development, and senior citizen services. In the nurturing environment of the black church, a sense of belonging and fellowship is encouraged through shared value orientations and experiences.

Using the Strengths of Black Families

With official sanction from the wider society, blacks are increasingly being exposed to the values, lifestyles, and technologies of external systems, and they now can dare to hope for greater opportunities as full participants. However, the behavior and attitudes required to succeed in wider systems—competition, individualism, and placing the value of property rights over human rights—promote a loss in the humanistic and

24. James P. Comer, *Beyond Black and White* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972), p.180.

25. Charles L. Sanders, "The Black Church as a Social Welfare Institution During the Antebellum Period," in *Social Service Delivery System in the Black Community*, ed., Alexander, p. 26.

The ideological framework of this model draws on several theoretical orientations to support an understanding of the transactions occurring between individuals and the environment. From general systems theory the concepts of interaction and transaction illuminate the process of exchange between human and institutional systems. "Ludwig von Bertalanffy defines a system as a 'complex of components in mutual interaction . . . any 'whole' consisting of interacting components.'"²⁷ Papajohn and Spiegel describe transaction as "the interpenetration and mutual reverberating and reciprocal effects of processes that can no longer be considered organized, detachable entities. It is . . . a question of system in process with system."²⁸ Knowledge of the processes between systems permits more accurate assessment of the problems experienced by black families and encourages the utilization of the strengths observed within the complex of systems to achieve a state of equilibrium.

Concepts from role theory are relevant to the model as they focus on "the network of positions with various expectations regarding behavior and represent the point of articulation between the individual and society."²⁹ Erik H. Erikson's concept of ego development through phase-specific task resolution stresses the important role of environmental conditions and, therefore, has relevance for this model.³⁰

The concepts of competence and mastery address the goals of the model, which are concerned with a reduction in the sense of powerlessness through the development and strengthening of skills for survival and achievement. Robert W. White defines competence as "the cumulative result of the history of interaction with the environment. Sense of competence is suggested as a suitable term . . . signifying one's consciously or unconsciously felt competence . . . in dealing with

26. Caryl B. Germain, "An Ecological Perspective in Casework Practice," *Social Casework* 54, no. 6 (June 1973): 326.

27. See Ludwig von Bertalanffy, "General Systems Theory and Psychiatry," in *Handbook of Psychiatry*, vol. 3, ed., Silvano Arieti (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 709; Orcutt, "Poverty on the American Scene"; and Gordon Hearn, "The General Systems Approach," in *The General Systems Approach: Contributions toward a Holistic Conception of Social Work*, ed., Gordon Hearn (New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1969).

28. Papajohn and Spiegel, *Transactions in Families*, p. 5.

29. See Harriet P. Trider, "Survival Strategies for Oppressed Minorities," *Social Work* 22, no. 1 (January 1977): 12. Role performance and interdependence concepts have also been ably discussed in Bruce J. Biddle and Edwin J. Thomas, eds., *Role Theory: Concepts and Research* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966), pp. 193-236.

30. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1963); Helen Harris Perlman, *Persona: Social Role and Personality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and Heinz Hartman, *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation* (New York: International Universities Press, 1958).

Section II

Program Development in The Black Community

The Need for Relevant Service

Black families and communities have been studied for decades, but there is little evidence of the development of programs that address the complexities of interacting systems with interventions designed to utilize black cultural forms for growth and change. Communities have begun to question the motivations of planners and service givers who express interest in their circumstances, design a service to relieve one aspect of the problem, and assess the effectiveness of their intervention with minimum consumer input. In recent years, black communities have begun to organize themselves to articulate their own needs and to demand services from knowledgeable, culturally attuned sources that will strengthen their capacities to negotiate internal and external systems.

The primary source of mental health in the black community is the black family, and its healthy functioning is a significant factor in the functioning of all other systems within its field of interaction. The black family, with its many structures and functions, has historically demonstrated its utility as a source of help and growth. The complexities of contemporary American society, however, have had tremendous influence on the cultural patterns which sustain and enhance black family life. Geographic mobility, urban centers, technological change, and increasing dependence on environmental supports strain black coping mechanisms, and the need arises for additional sources of help. The philosophical base of the family service system seems to offer the commitment that supports the strengthening of black families and the improved functioning of all systems that have an impact on their lives.

In most urban centers, and in some smaller communities, there are established family service agencies with the purpose of contributing "to harmonious family interrelationships, to strengthen the positive values in family life, and to promote healthy personality development and satisfactory social functioning of various family members."¹

1. *Scope and Methods of the Family Service Agency*, Report of the Committee on Methods and Scope (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1953), p. 3.

tees, and to occupy any jobs slated for consumers. It is vital, however, that the agendas and roles of the planning agency and the community organization be clearly stated in order to avoid the loss of a needed service through energies expended in power plays.

Consumer input is vital to the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of program service to the black community. In addition, residence in the neighborhood has given the vantage point of seeing many services established and some dismantled. Community assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of these programs is important to the design and implementation of any future services planned. Consultation with religious organizations, respected community leaders, and other social agencies active in the community will provide valuable data and establish relationships which will benefit both consumers and service givers. Black institutions, such as Afro-American Family and Community Services of Chicago and Detroit Homes for Black Children, have an experience base and commitment to the black community that suggests they would be valued resources for community service planners.

Neighborhood Needs Assessment

An ecological systems approach permits an exploration of transactions that are both internal and external to the community. Traditionally, research teams have been used to evaluate the outcome of programs with minimal attention given to the need for service as expressed by the black community. A major priority for service to this group is the design of data collection tools with the capability of extracting information related to the specific psychosocial needs of the residents, the resources (both formal and informal) currently and formerly available, and the identification of unmet needs. This requisite information can be obtained, using consumer help, through such direct contact methods as door-to-door surveys, shopping area polls, or street fair booths. The data obtained can be validated or eliminated through consultation with community organizations, churches, schools, and other helping agents active in the neighborhood. These initial contacts with the residents and neighborhood institutions are vital to receiving sanction for the development of community-based programs. The attitudes and behaviors of the interviewers and planners must, therefore, respect the capacity of the black community to recognize its own needs and to participate in developing interventions that can best actualize those needs.

An exploration of the transactions between members of the black community and the larger environment may point out reciprocal communications with education and employment systems requiring interventions in several areas to establish or to reestablish equilibrium. Neighborhood assessment may reveal naturally occurring groups with the potential for the development of self-help mechanisms. For example, the commonality of experience found among working mothers with

develop a commitment to remove environmental constraints that have a destructive impact on black families.

Staff Composition and Training

The staffing of programs designed to ameliorate the problems of poor black families raises a number of issues. Most students of the black family would agree that a high level of competency in working with individuals, families, groups, and institutions is vital to the success of interventive strategies for multifaceted problems. There seems to be less agreement on the importance of racial similarity, of professional education, and of the cultural sensitivity of workers assigned to serve these families.

Knowledge of the cultural base from which the client is operating is vital to the accurate assessment of the coping mechanisms a black client may be using. Black cultural forms, such as the black church and the extended family, are supportive and adaptive functions that should be recognized and utilized by service givers in the black community. The need for cultural sensitivity should no longer be in question in a pluralistic society.

To establish working relationships with black individuals and groups, one must be familiar with the language of the black community. Although it is *different* from standard English, it must be recognized as "a highly organized, complex language that is very useful, quite understandable and hence serves a communicative function."⁴ This language, often labeled "patois," is accepted in the black community, has a direct relationship to the development of self-esteem, and supports a sense of cultural connectedness within the group. Non-black service givers should be sensitive to the utility of these speech patterns as they facilitate the negotiation of both internal and external systems. Efforts to destroy this cultural pattern would be nonproductive, because blacks must maintain skills for survival in two cultures. Intervention strategies should focus instead on *expanding* verbal skills in order to enhance social competence in the larger society. The unique language spoken in some communities cannot be learned from a perusal of the literature; understanding comes through relationships with community residents and through interpretations from black colleagues who are familiar with the patterns. Majority group staff members should not attempt to speak the language, as this behavior implies condescension and limits the opportunities for modeling standard English patterns. They must, however, develop comprehension and reflect acceptance of the black client's

4. See Dorcas Davis Bowles, "Intervention Strategies for Black Families Suffering Multiple Trauma and Stress." Paper presented at the National Urban League Conference on Black Families, Chicago, Illinois, 2-5 November, 1977, p. 5; William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), pp. 96-108; and Jualynne Dodson and Susan Ross, *Afro-American Culture: Expressive Behaviors* (Atlanta, Ga.: Atlanta University, School of Social Work, 1977), pp. 1-16.

ing the resistance to therapy that has been observed in black clients.⁹ White counselors should be conscious of the level of comfort they experience in the presence of blacks who bring differences in class, communication patterns, and value systems, as well as in physical features. Blacks are highly sensitive to rejection and attempts to hide feelings rarely go undetected. Relationships with black staff, whose knowledge and skills are considered requisite to the success of the program, enhance the capacity of white staff to function in the black community.

Black and white practitioners must develop an awareness of their own feelings and value systems that have the potential for both negative and positive use in the helping process. Staff development programs, individual and group supervision, and peer review can be used to work through these issues and incorporate these qualities, as suggested by Dorcas Davis Bowles:

(1) Openness, (2) the ability to listen and to accept differences in values that are different from one's own, (3) willingness to be self-aware, (4) the capacity to acknowledge one's own limitations, (5) a willingness to negate stereotypes and myths learned in the volumes of scientific literature written about blacks, and (6) confidence in the black client's capacity for self-understanding.¹⁰

Myths and Stereotypes

The curricula of most professional schools of human service offer minimal course content on black Americans and that which does get presented is based on a body of literature that contributes to and perpetuates a multitude of myths and stereotypes on black family life.¹¹ One factor which seems to preoccupy the time and interest of many social scientists is the role of the black woman. The observed pattern of more female-headed black families (37 percent in 1977) than female-headed white families (11 percent in 1977)¹² has prompted a line of research that attributes most black family problems to its matriarchal structure: "The term matriarchy, denotatively, is a misnomer when only applied to a minority of black families in the United States. A genuine matriarchy is a society in which some, if not all, of the legal powers relating to the ordering and governing of the family are lodged in women

9. Harriette Pipes McAdoo, "Family Therapy in the Black Community," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 47 (January 1977): 75-79.

10. Dorcas Davis Bowles, "Treatment Issues in Working with Black Clients," *Smith College School for Social Work Journal* 4 (Winter 1977): 10-11.

11. Resources for schools of social work seeking to enhance the "black" content in their programs are the two predominantly black schools—Atlanta University (Atlanta, Ga.) and Howard University (Washington, D.C.)—where core curricula have been developed to reflect their knowledge of and commitment to the black community.

12. Robert B. Hill, "The Economic Status of Black Families and Children," in *The State of Black America 1978* (New York: National Urban League, 1978), p. 35.

munications that occur in the natural settings of black adolescents, street-corner men, and church social groups.

Exposure to the many variations in the thinking, feeling, and behavior of black community residents would prepare the service giver to be skeptical of generalizations and encourage the design and utilization of interventions that respect the black capacity for growth and change within a reasonable environment.

Program Components

To design a program of family service for the low-income black community requires the integration of methods and specialized services that have the capacity to address both internal and external barriers to effective social functioning. Planners and service givers must reduce the focus on individual pathology, recognize and utilize the strengths of black families, and develop a strong commitment to change those institutional patterns that inhibit black family functioning.

Advocacy

Family advocacy should be the core function of any agency committed to the mental health of black families. A good place to begin the process of the identification of advocacy issues is within the agency itself. Internal advocacy requires that an agency take a hard look at itself to isolate staffing patterns, attitudes, programs, board composition and function, policies, and budget priorities that may affect its commitment to serve poor black families. Such an assessment will highlight the strengths of established agencies and suggest the need for change, if a commitment to black families is to be obtained. Although agencies frequently profess to be committed to serving poor black families, these programs often receive a low priority for funds. The black community has witnessed the development of programs with time-limited grants and the withdrawal of service upon completion of the demonstration of a strategy or technique. When "special projects," implemented with "soft money," are found to be effective interventions for the black community, the committed agency has a responsibility to build them into the core of service, with high priority for a share of "hard" agency funds.

In a large agency, a family advocacy unit or committee may be established to assume responsibility for staff training in the identification of advocacy issues and for designing a method to move from case to cause. A sensitivity to advocacy issues should permeate all agency programs through a communication system designed to report on contacts with unresponsive agencies and trends which seem to be developing in caseloads, such as battered wives or needs for temporary housing. The advocacy unit, armed with data received on one or several cases, can design innovative, creative strategies to approach the institutions interfering with family functioning. If the consultation is not successful, and

tion tools designed to record the resources used, the names of responsive and nonresponsive persons, and the outcomes as they affect individuals, families, communities, and institutions. Such record-keeping facilitates future advocacy efforts and produces statistical data—such as numbers affected or dollars saved—which supports accountability and is important to board and funding sources.

Staffs of small agencies should be trained to identify and develop strategies for the resolution of advocacy issues in their caseloads through using consultants, attending workshops, and securing literature addressed to the process of social action.²⁰ In small towns, the presence of minority groups may be nonthreatening to the wider community, and communication with social institutions may be easier to obtain. Family life appears to be highly valued, which suggests that institutional response to identified negative impact on family functioning would be positive. In the case of Hispanics and blacks, the commonalities of their social conditions—racism and poverty—provide a rationale for the development of coalitions. A project that brings them together as a group would enhance their understanding and respect for each other while increasing the power base for the resolution of common issues.

Counseling

Clinical practitioners have been floundering for the past decade over determining where the focus of service should be for low-income black families. When black scholars began to take them to task for their adherence to intrapsychic probing for causation with little attention to the oppressive environment, a shift in focus was observed.²¹ There appeared to be movement toward development of advocacy skills for social change, and clinical service was felt to be irrelevant for blacks. In recent years, the pendulum has again swung to give recognition to the continued viability of clinical services for blacks if they are offered with a sensitivity to the cultural and wider society influences. James P. Comer states that "blacks, like every other group, suffer the full range of mental illnesses. That means they need the full range of mental health services needed by other populations."²²

20. See Ellen Manser, ed., *Family Advocacy: A Manual for Action* (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1973); *Project Enable*, special issue of *Social Casework* 48; (December 1967): 609-47; Charles F. Grosser, "Community Development Programs Serving the Urban Poor," *Social Work* 11 (July 1965): 15-21; Robert Sunley, "Family Advocacy: From Case to Cause," *Social Casework* 51 (June 1970): 347-57.

21. For a discussion on the medical model as inappropriate and detrimental to the mental health of racial minorities, see Bobby E. Wright, "The Development and Maintenance of Non-Whites' Mental Health and Facilities in a Hostile White Society," in *Mental Health Programs for Racial Minorities*, ed., Charles L. Sanders (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Urban Affairs and Research, 1977).

22. See James P. Comer, "The Need is Now," *Mental Health* 57 (Winter 1973): 4; and David Hallowitz, "Counseling and Treatment of the Poor Black Family," *Social Casework* 56 (October 1975): 451-59.

the individuals should be aware of the value in expressing pent-up feelings, but equally attuned to the larger consequences if these feelings are not properly channeled.²⁸

Black individuals and families who are confronted daily with environmental problems rarely come to social agencies seeking personality change. Initial contact may be a request for help with a situational or developmental crisis, often at the suggestion of an institution such as the court or the school. A program with integrated methods is an open system that gives access to service for immediate needs, in addition to that which promotes growth and change.

Crisis intervention is a modality which uses the strengths of individuals and families to prevent breakdown in the aftermath of upsets and losses such as death, divorce, fire, or unemployment. Intervention during a period of upset to the equilibrium deters regression and promotes growth using ego-supportive techniques. Lydia Rapoport sees the goals of crisis-oriented brief treatment as: "(1) relief of symptoms; (2) restoration to the optimal level of functioning that existed before the present crisis; (3) understanding of the relevant precipitating events that contributed to the state of disequilibrium; (4) identification of remediable measures that can be taken by the client or family or that are available through community resources."²⁹ Other short-term interventions, such as task-centered casework, have been developed for use in situations where long-term service is not indicated and the restoration of functioning in one area would meet the needs of an individual or family.³⁰

Although crisis and other brief treatment modes are useful with some families, the danger presented to programs designed for the black community is that they may become the primary methods used for all poor blacks coming through the clinical door. The tendency to see all members of this group as "present-oriented" and unable to sustain long-term relationships has prompted service givers to select these methods as the most efficient solution to the multifaceted problems observed in poor black families. The crisis-brief treatment model "can only be properly used as one of an array of services offered differentially on the basis of a diagnosis of the client's needs and receptivity, though proponents may see it as a model for helping the masses—the chronically poor and disorganized families who are crisis prone."³¹

28. See Grier and Cobbs, *Black Rage*, and Bowles, "Treatment Issues in Working with Black Clients."

29. See Lydia Rapoport, "Crisis Intervention as a Model of Brief Treatment," in *Theories of Social Casework*, eds., Robert W. Roberts and Robert H. Nee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 27; and Howard J. Parad, ed., *Crisis Intervention: Selected Readings* (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1965).

30. See, for example, William J. Reid and Laura Epstein, *Task-Centered Casework* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).

31. Nancy Robinson, "Current Issues for Social Casework in the Provision of Service to Lower Socioeconomic Groups," in *Poverty and Social Casework Services*, ed., Ben A. Orcutt (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974), p. 52.

encourage the development of support systems that continue to be functional after the group leader withdraws.

The group should be structured with tasks and goals that are within the limits of the clients' social reality in order to avoid disenchantment and withdrawal from the treatment process. Techniques should be functional, offer assurance and advice during the initial phases, and pay special attention to the immediate needs presented by group members. The role of the trained mental health aide maintains the reality perspective and assures that environmental issues are not ignored. As group co-leader and consultant, the paraprofessional brings a dimension to the service which supports black self-esteem and the development of a sense of competency.

Preventive groups, such as those brought together in family life education programs, are important elements in service delivery to the black community. In the absence of support systems composed of extended kin, neighbors, and friends, black families must look to other environmental resources for help with developmental and situational tasks. For basically healthy families and individuals who desire to enhance the quality of their lives, family life education programs offer:

A wide range of services designed to enrich understanding of interpersonal relationships, to inform participants in such specific areas of family functioning as sex, money management and child rearing, and to assist family members to widen the boundaries of information and breadth of understanding against which they make choices of behavior in all their life situations.³⁴

These preventive programs can make use of the natural helping systems of the black community for the discussion of issues such as single parenthood or adolescent sex. The formation of groups to focus on the socialization process, family roles and relationships, or parenting techniques should demonstrate an awareness of cultural patterns that are influenced by social reality. Program planners and practitioners should respect the experience base of black parents who must teach their children to survive in a hostile society. The harsh discipline of black male children in particular may stem from a desire to prevent a more severe response from the larger society. To teach children to separate being black from being bad is a difficult task when a parent must, for example, discourage a son's practicing the 100-yard dash on public streets for fear of his life or detention by the police. Group leaders should be aware of the reciprocal learning process, and curriculum designs should be flexible enough to relate to the expressed needs of the group.

Although initial participation in the discussion groups may focus on individual needs, the formation of a group identity surrounding institu-

34. Ellen Manser, ed., *Family Advocacy: A Manual for Action* (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1973), pp. 12-13.

continues to function as an ongoing system after the worker terminates with it.³⁶

It is important that service givers be sensitive to the different value orientations operative when evaluating service outcome in the black community. Consumer perception of change efforts may derive from an accurate testing of social realities, while worker optimism and middle-class value orientation may influence unrealistic predictions for outcome.

The use of clients' subjective responses to assess the outcomes of service should be further supported by the measurable tasks completed. If the goal for a group of adolescent boys is to reduce delinquent behavior and develop social competency, such items as school attendance, employment, participation in special projects, reading level change, or police contacts could be used to assess the level of improvement or regression. Equally important in program evaluation is the assessment of institutional change. Follow-up evaluations for clients and institutions after intervals of six months, one year, or two years are vital in determining the strengths of a helping strategy and its staying power.³⁷

Service evaluation can produce information on the cost efficiency of techniques used. If data can be extracted to document that a given change effort has reduced client dependency and costs to external systems, agency boards, funding sources, and news media should be advised of these findings. Social service professionals have a responsibility to share creative interventions that change identified systems, giving factors from evaluation that seem to be causally connected. It is from the findings on individuals and groups that researchers can develop a literature base that defines the complexities of black family functioning and validates those interventions which sustain and enhance the quality of black family life.

Conclusions

An assessment of the institutions that exist to insure the well-being of all citizens reveals transactions with black individuals and families that are detrimental to their survival and to the development of a sense of social competence. The social welfare commitments of the 1960s to remove societal constraints and to enhance black family functioning were partialized into single-factor programs that lacked the cultural

36. Allen Pincus and Anne Minahan, *Social Work Practice: Model and Method* (Itasca, Ill.: F.E. Peacock, Publishers, 1973), p. 274.

37. See the model developed by Dorothy Fahs Beck and Mary Ann Jones, *How to Conduct a Client Follow-up Study* (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1974). The findings of two agencies using this model are described in Patrick V. Riley, "Practice Changes Based on Research Findings," *Social Casework* 56 (April 1975): 242-50, and Wilda J. Dailey and Kenneth Ives, "Exploring Client Reactions to Agency Service," *Social Casework* 59 (April 1978): 233-46.

teraction. Additional research is needed on black middle-class families if the patterns that result from poverty rather than culture are to be distinguished. The study of black family life, at this point in time, has revealed its many structures and lifestyles; however, further research would refine the capacities to assess the processes of internal transactions as they relate to the social conditions experienced by black American families.

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